Subject: Greeting and Gratitude
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From: Office of the President

A video version of this greeting is available in News and Announcements.

Good morning, Middlebury. I've been looking forward to this day for a long time. As I begin my first day as president, I wanted to send a note of greeting and gratitude—and to offer some initial thoughts on our shared time ahead.

To start, I want to thank the Middlebury presidents who have come before me, two in particular: Laurie Patton and Steve Snyder. Laurie, Steve, thank you for your leadership, the paths you've opened, and your devoted stewardship of this place. We are all indebted to you.

Since I was appointed in January, I've had the opportunity to visit the College to meet with students, faculty, staff, and our senior leadership team. I've spent time with our Board of Trustees, visited our office in Washington, D.C., and several of our Schools Abroad, traveled to Monterey to be introduced to the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS), and met with alumni and parents from Charlottesville to San Francisco, Washington, D.C., to Vermont. Those visits and conversations have sharpened my sense of just how lucky I am to be joining you. They've helped me see a Middlebury that has established itself as a defining American and global institution of higher education; a Middlebury founded in the Champlain Valley of Vermont; now stretching across the world and reveling in the richness of the world's languages, sciences, cultures and societies, and the urgency of the arts. A Middlebury filled with professors devoted to their students and the advance of knowledge. A Middlebury where exceptional staff create, facilitate, and enhance spaces where learning takes place. A Middlebury dedicated over the course of its history to the transformation of young lives and the democratic possibility that comes from students and faculty living and studying together, producing knowledge and art together.

You've helped me see a Middlebury committed to engaging, for our common good, the most complicated questions of history and our times: the nature and future of global conflicts; the precarious systems of our climate-changed economies, oceans, and planet; the rich and complex array of cultures forming our pasts and fashioning our present; the continuing revolutions in artificial intelligence and biotechnology; the promise, vulnerabilities, and future of democracy. You've helped me see a Middlebury whose history and whose values have prepared us to meet the shifting currents and possibilities of this complex moment. That fills me with optimism for our future.

For this truly is a complex moment, for Middlebury and all of higher education. All generations believe their times are pivotal. This one is. And if we are to enter our future not just with optimism but with clear eyes, we'll need the clear-eyed wisdom that comes

from the full diversity of who we are and the call of a common purpose. Over the coming weeks and months, I will be seeking that shared wisdom. I need to hear from you, listen to you, think with you. We won't always all agree on the best path ahead. There are many routes to the future. And it is essential to the nature and mission of colleges and universities that we are home to thoughtful and strenuous disagreement and debate. But if we can articulate the principles guiding us, if we can name what we are for, we will arrive at that future wisely and well. I have no doubt of it.

I want to begin that work of shared thinking right away. Over the remaining course of the summer, I'll be meeting with our department chairs, leaders of the Faculty Council, Staff Council, alumni groups, parents, our Senior Leadership Group, the Board of Trustees, colleagues from MIIS, Bread Loaf, the Language Schools, and our Schools Abroad, civic leaders, and many others. As the new academic year begins, we will expand those conversations to engage all our faculty, staff, students, and the multiple constituents of our community, with one common end in mind: debating and responding to that question, What are we for? Enduringly. Currently. What future will we choose for ourselves, knowing what we are for?

I'm looking forward to that shared deliberation. To make it a bit less abstract, I want to end by naming three things that the conversations I've already benefited from have made clear. We must strengthen our core; connect the whole of who we are; and we must meet our moment.

Strengthening Our Core

Middlebury is many spectacular things, springing from a core. That core is the College. At the center of that core is the wonder of faculty and undergraduate students studying, living, and discovering together. That is the magic of the residential liberal arts. That magic is real. It is alive at Middlebury. But we cannot take it for granted. We are coming through a period of intense strain. The strain of the COVID years. The ongoing strain of significant financial challenges facing us and peer institutions around the nation. The strain of the multiple disruptions and assaults on higher education unfolding around us and their impacts on students and their families, faculty, and staff. If we are to name what we are for, we must begin by naming that core, and we must constantly strengthen it. That means we must invest in our faculty, students, and staff. We must, in particular, invest in faculty salaries, research, and opportunities for faculty to develop the classes they teach. We must invest in financial aid to ensure that Middlebury remains accessible to all our students, and support all our students so they can thrive in their studies and life together. We must recognize and reward our staff. And we must commit ourselves, unwaveringly, to the academic freedom on which everything we do depends. This is our core. It must be strong, so that everything we do can be.

Connecting the Whole

Middlebury has evolved since our founding. That, too, is part of the marvel of this place. We are the College and the Language Schools, Bread Loaf, MIIS, a young School of the Environment, and the Schools Abroad. We are present in Vermont, Washington, D.C., California, and dozens of cities around the globe. We educate undergraduate students and graduate students. We are home to the world-leading Center for

Nonproliferation Studies, the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation, the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, and a host of climate and environment initiatives from our home campus in Middlebury to the Center for the Blue Economy in Monterey. For decades we have been a key center of advanced education for civil servants, interpreters, and other professionals from around the globe. In many ways we are less like our NESCAC peer Williams than our Ivy League peer Dartmouth—a historic and innovative institution built around a defining undergraduate liberal arts college that also has many of the features of a global university.

It's my preliminary sense, though, that we haven't yet fully articulated how all those parts fit together. I'd like us to take the opportunity to do so, to identify what kind of institution we are and aspire to be: so our whole can be more than the sum of its parts, and so those parts can work better together toward a common end. We cannot, however, do so without definitively resolving the future of MIIS and its range of academic programs. That question has been left open for too long. It is time to answer it, and we will, within my first year as president if not sooner. Whatever the answer on MIIS, we must continue to be a Middlebury for the world, an institution for students, faculty, languages, and ideas from around the globe. That commitment has long defined us. In a time when many nations—ours included—are turning inward, that resolute openness to the world must remain defining of what we are for.

Meeting Our Moment

Which leads me to the last thing. Like all generations, we must meet our moment. In this time, we are particularly called to do so, as our faculty have recently resolved. We are, to put it plainly, in the midst of an unprecedented assault not only on higher education in general but on the particular ideals Middlebury has long embodied: academic freedom; the unconstrained pursuit of knowledge; the rich diversity of who we are and aim to be. At such times we must speak and act in support of those ideals.

There is, as we know, some debate on this. Many of our peer institutions have recently adopted positions of institutional neutrality or restraint, generally modeled on the principles of the University of Chicago's 1967 Kalven Report. There is a great deal of wisdom in that report, including in the deservedly famous line, "The university is the home and sponsor of critics, it is not itself the critic," and its underlying commitment to ensuring that all individual members of an academic community are free to speak as they think, unfettered by an official institutional position. I believe absolutely in that commitment and will uphold it. Too often, though, the corollary to that principle is forgotten. As the report also says, "From time to time, instances will arise in which the society, or segments of it, threaten the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry. In such a crisis, it becomes the obligation of the university as an institution to oppose such measures and actively to defend its interests and its values." We are in such a time. I take that obligation equally seriously, and as president I will speak and act to defend our mission and our values whenever they are threatened.

But playing defense isn't enough. Too much of our culture and public discourse is animated by what we oppose. We also need to name what we affirm, what we are for, what we exist to advance and make possible—in the lives of our students, in the research we pursue and the art we produce, in being a Middlebury for our town, nation,

world, and planet. We need, simultaneously, to find ways to live the truth that in opposing particular policies we are not opposing a political party but that we are also, always, for the free exchange of ideas, across horizons: conservative and liberal, secular and religious, enduring and emerging. And as we meet our moment, we must ensure that we are both responsible to it and that we do not allow our imaginations to be limited by it. We must remember that the time of education, research, and the arts is longer than the time of politics, longer than electoral cycles, that we are called to think in years, decades, and centuries: alive to the shaping power of national and world history, ancient and new; alert to the arriving futures of technology, social life, market innovations, climate change, artificial intelligence, and the cultural forms flowing through this moment and beyond it; attentive to all those histories and developments our faculty are in a unique position to understand, our students will soon help lead, and whose possibilities for the good we can best help shape the more we can name who we are, and what we are for.

On all these questions we will need our collective wisdom and debate. Thank you in advance for all that shared work. Thank you for the chance to join this remarkable community. I'm looking forward to everything that lies ahead.

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Ian B. Baucom
President